

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 7, 1875, with transcript

Salem, Mass., Nov. 7th, 1875. Dear Miss Mabel,

I am afraid to write to you! I sit with pen in hand — and fear to let my thoughts escape.

I have already startled you sufficiently. What if I should do so again?

If I could only find some freezing-mixture cold enough for the purpose — I would put my letter into it ! — and then perhaps I should be safe!

However as that can't be — it must go as it is — and take its chance. If I am to commit suicide I don't want to do it with my pen — and so I shall try at all events — to restrain myself.

I have not the remotest idea what I am going to say. There is one object I have so much at heart that I am afraid to touch upon it now. I have already written to you twice upon this subject — and twice have I destroyed my letters! It was only last week that I wrote you quite a long letter — but when I came to look it over I felt that you might not trust me sufficiently to appreciate my motive in writing — and so I burned the letter. Perhaps on some future occasion I may send you its ashes diluted with other material!

I must thank you for a very pleasant afternoon yesterday. When I called on Saturday — I felt that my Thursday's letter must have frightened you away from me altogether — and I feared that you would not see me. 2 Had I received your note before calling — or had I suspected the impression left upon your mind by my letter — I should have been too much alarmed to have called at all. It was my feverishness and impatience that made me for a

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moment break through all restraints in writing to you — and not a feeling of holding you in less estimation.

How could I blame you for pitying me? I understood all the time what was passing in your mind — and it was this very knowledge that created the tumult in my heart — of which you caught a glimpse.

I realized for the first time how far apart we were and how one-sided the attachment was. I recognized that I was merely suffered to be near you — and that I had obtained no real place in your affection — and it made me so unhappy that I wrote to you.

My object in writing was merely to ask you to help me to control myself — by not encouraging me in any way unless you were interested in me — for any other course I felt would be mistaken kindness so far as I was concerned. But my heart was so full when I wrote that my language was exaggerated — and this caused my meaning to be misunderstood. I certainly respected you very much for the letter you sent me upon the subject — but you must not think I respected you any the less before I received it. My letter to you now lies in half-a-hundred places between Cambridge and Boston! Let us tear up the memory of it too — and pass it by as though it had never been.

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You must not think that my visits to Cambridge are hindering me in my work. I can assure you they are having just the opposite effect. I am ashamed to say that I never attended to anything properly till now — but it is very hard work I can assure you at present. My plans for the winter are beginning to take shape — and I hope in the course of a few days to complete them.

I recommenced work at my telegraphic schemes today — and intend setting apart a portion of every day for that subject — but I am so worried about other matters — that at present I can devote far too little thought to the subject.

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I am quite troubled at what you have told me of your sister — and should like to hear from you from time to time how she is. I trust that she may not be as delicate as you fear — and that the change from Cambridge to New York may prove beneficial. I must say however that Cambridge seems to me infinitely preferable to New York as a place for winter-residence. Please remember me kindly to her when you write.

Do not forget me either to your sister Miss Berta or to your Aunt.

I don't know whether you are a good correspondent or not. I have a shocking reputation in that respect. I am more erratic in letter-writing than in anything else!

It must be a great pleasure to you to have your 4 cousin Miss Hubbard with you. California is so far away in spite of Railroads and Telegraphs that you can have met but seldom. I trust however that you do not consider her as a “distant” relation. Should she be “once removed” — I trust she will soon come back. Please remember me to her and to all at your home.

Yours sincerely A. Graham Bell. Miss Mabel Hubbard Brattle St., Cambridge.